



IRONBOUND: Newark, New Jersey
an urban portrait

photographs by
Donald P. Lokuta

IRONBOUND

Newark, New Jersey

The Ironbound is a small section of Newark, New Jersey which is separated from the rest of the city by the Passaic River on its north and east sides and by a complex web of railroad track marking its other boundaries. Due to the prevalence of the iron and steel of railroad construction, the area became known as the Ironbound.

I have always been fascinated by this area of Newark which seemed so different from the rest of the city. I have been familiar with the Ironbound as far back as my earliest recollections through frequent visits to the homes of friends.

The idea of photographing the Ironbound had occurred to me only after moving back to New Jersey following a three year residence in Ohio. Upon my return, the area outwardly appeared the same as I had left it yet something had changed. It was vastly different than the Mid-West, and much different than any other urban area I had seen. Actually, the Ironbound did not change, I did. I felt that I discovered this small community for the first time after so many years. I began to sense the pride of the people in their well-kept homes and clean neighborhood. Everyone was always friendly, and there was a sense of community spirit. The people worked hard for a living and they were proud of what they owned and what they had accomplished.

The majority of the people of the Ironbound are of recent foreign ancestry: Irish, Polish, Italian, and Portuguese. They live in neat homes which are close together and, as in many urban situations, surrounded by light and heavy industry and commerce. But, unlike many urban areas which have a quickly changing population, the Ironbound is stable. It appears that the people who lived down the street ten years ago are still there and indeed most are.

Because there has been no major and sudden population shifts in the Ironbound, the area retains certain ethnic characteristics that give it an old world flavor. The parades and church fairs, the architecture with its painstaking stonework and colorful tiles, and the close-knit character of the residents give the Ironbound a uniqueness of which few urban areas can boast.

Although many of the homes are over one hundred years old, they have not been allowed to deteriorate. It is a pleasure to walk down a city street of 19th century homes and realize that urban blight has never been a problem and urban renewal is unnecessary.

The photographs of the Ironbound were made during a five year period of time. They, like all photographs, represent a very personal view of what really exists. These photographs are not meant to present various sides of an issue, but merely to show in a more intense way what I saw, and what I felt was important for others to see. To me the photographs of the Ironbound do more than document a neighborhood. They deal with the personalities of the people and show how they fit into their environment. The photographs are not just of an area of Newark called Ironbound. It is the people that make the Ironbound what it is today, and it is those people, the way they really are, that are the real subjects of this series of photographs.

Donald P. Lokuta
April 1980
Union, New Jersey

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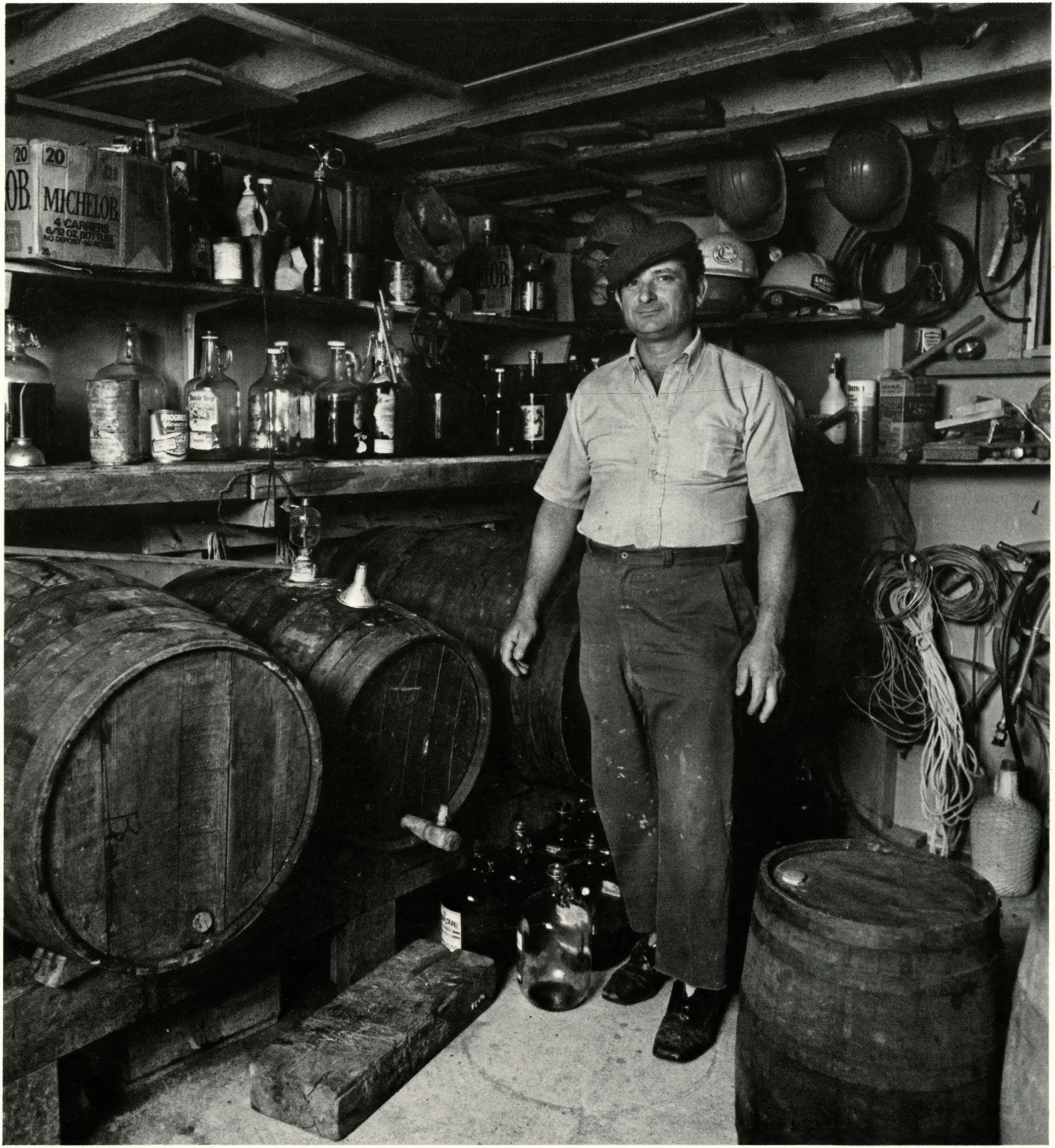
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